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Educational Tradition of *Ijāzah* in Islamic History with Reference to Persian Milieu

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Abstract

From the earliest periods of Islamic history and civilization, the educational system was originally religious in nature. It began with the mosque as its centre, from which other educational institutions such as the *maktab*, the *bayt al-hikmah*, the *majālis*, the *dār al-‘ulūm*, and the *madāris* gradually developed. In addition, from the vast fields of medicine, astronomy and the devotional sciences emerges the advent of hospitals, observatories, and the *zāwiyah* within Sūfī fraternities. In the aforementioned educational institutions, students were trained in different fields of Islamic studies that systematically includes both transmitted and applied subjects by their professors. Moreover, they were able to select their professors as they wished. When they had completed their studies, according to a certain level of proficiency to the professor's satisfaction, they would traditionally be accorded a 'licence to teach', a so-called *ijāzah*, either by one professor or by more than one. It is this *ijāzah* tradition which has a long history in Muslim education, which deserved special attention where the Persian milieu were part of this tradition right from the beginning; and in some places until the present day. *Ijāzah* tradition played a very significant role not only among Muslims but also among other religions; therefore, this article studies this unique educational tradition with special reference to Persian milieu.

Keywords: Education, *ijāzah*, Islamic civilization, Islamic history, Persian milieu

Introductory Remarks on the History of Islamic Education

It is impossible to study the history of education and learning institutions in Islamic history and civilization without making reference to the meaning and history of Islamic education in the past. It is also the same with regard to the tradition of the *ijāzah* as it plays a very central role in education. The meaning of education in its totality in the context of Islam is inherent in the connotations of the terms *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim* and *ta'dīb* taken together. What each of these terms conveys concerning man and his society and environment in relation to God is related to the others, and together they represent the scope of education in Islam, both 'formal' and 'non-formal.'¹

From the earliest periods of Islam, its educational system was originally religious in nature. It began with the mosque as its centre, from which other educational institutions such as the *maktab*

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¹Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education*, ed., Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University, 1979), Appendix B, 157-158. For further elaboration see Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1998), 132-151.

(the elementary education),² the *bayt al-hikmah* (the house of wisdom),³ the *majālis* (the gatherings of scholars and students),⁴ the *Dār al-'Ulūm* (sing. 'ilm),⁵ and the *madāris* (sing. *madrasah*, school or college) gradually developed. In addition, several hospitals, observatories, and the *zāwiyyah* within Sūfī fraternities emerged from the fields of medicine, astronomy and the devotional sciences.

After the expansion of Islam, the number of students gradually increased. In addition, studies concerning the sciences of jurisprudence and the foundations of faith led to the genesis of new scientific disciplines, began to develop rapidly that led increasingly to more vibrant discussion and debate. Study surrounding these new disciplines could not be adequately conducted in the mosques, where one is required to be quiet as a mark of reverence for the awesome significance in the ritual duty about to be performed. Under these circumstances, the aforementioned study-circles gradually relocated from the mosque to other venues, namely the *madrasah* (plural: *madāris*).⁶

Nevertheless, the distinction between the intellectual functions of the mosque and the *madrasah* were not apparent, for even after *madrasah*'s were established, the mosques remained as centers of learning much as they had been previously. The distinguishing features between the *madrasah* and the mosque were very slight.⁷ For example, al-Azhar which was founded by the Fātimids in 359 A.H./970 A.D. was originally established as a mosque; later on in 378 A.H./988 A.D. it was formally organized and declared a higher institution of learning.

With the augmentation of Islam and the rapid growth and spread of Islamic culture and thought, Muslim scholars began to author various books in the domain of philosophy (*falsafah*), logic (*mantiq*), the pure sciences and the religious sciences. In addition, voluminous works containing numerous translations from other languages into Arabic, most notably medical works translated from the Greeks, began to appear. Most of these translations, including original works by the Muslim scholars as well, were used as textbooks and studied in the *madrasah*'s.

For example, some of the books studied on the subject of exegesis (*tafsīr*) in the *madrasah*'s of Jerusalem during the reign of the Ayyūbids and Mamlūks included; the *Al-Kashshāf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzīl* of al-Imām Abī al-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī (d. 537/1143), the *Ma'ālīm al-Tanzīl fī al-Tafsīr* of al-Imām Abī Muhammad al-Bughawī (d. 516 A.H.), the *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb* of al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), the *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl* of al-Imām 'Abdullah al-Baydāwī (d. 685/1280) and so on. In those same *madrasah*'s the following books on the subject of logic were

²For further details see Mehdi Nakosteen, *History of Islamic Origins of Western Education* (Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 1964), 46; George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges; Institutions of learning in Islam and the West*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 19; and Ahmad Shalaby, *History of Muslim education*, (Karachi: Indus Publication, 1979), 18-23.

³For details see Ahmad Shalaby, *History of Muslim Education* (Karachi: Indus Publication, 1979), 96-97.

⁴See George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 10-12.

⁵Ahmad Shalaby, *History of Muslim Education*, 99-102.

⁶*Madrasah* literally means college. It is a derivation from the verb *darasa*, meaning "to read" or "to study". See *Ibid*.

⁷For further elaboration see George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, 21-34.

studied; the *Al-Shamsiyyah* of Najm al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Qazwīnī (d. 693A.H.), and the *Tahdhīb al-Mantiq wa al-Kalām* of Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 1389A.D.), to name a couple.⁸

The professors who taught in the *madrasah*’s were accorded specific designations relative to their field of expertise, namely *mudarris*, *shaykh* and *ustādh*. The designation *mudarris* was the common term reserved for the professor of *fiqh* (law, jurisprudence). As to the designation *ustādh*, it was a kind of honorary application, which continues to this day in the Arab speaking countries. As far as its designation in contemporary Arabic use, it is the equivalent of the term ‘professor.’⁹

In the aforementioned educational institutions, students (*talaba*, *tullāb*; single: *tālib*) were trained in different fields of Islamic studies systematically by their professors and were able to select their professors as they wished. Typically, students would study many years under the tutelage of their esteemed professors. When they had completed their studies according to a certain level of proficiency to the professor’s satisfaction, they would traditionally be accorded a ‘licence to teach’ or ‘authorization to transmit,’ a so-called *ijāzah*, either by one professor or by more than one. It is this *ijāzah* tradition which has a long history in Muslim education.

Having provided a brief survey on the meaning of education in Islam and its associated institutions, we will proceed with the *ijāzah* tradition which has a long history in Muslim or Islamic education.

2. *Ijāzah* as a Unique Tradition in the History of Education

Ijāzah is an Arabic term derived from the root-verb ‘*ajaza*’ which means, as Ibn Manzūr states in his *Lisān al-‘Arab*¹⁰ with reference to the etymological origin, that to “lean upon” as on a cushion. Al-Nawawī, in his *al-Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr li-Ma‘rifati Sunan al-Bashīr al-Nazīr*, says that this verb used to refer to the water which irrigated the fields or satisfied the thirst.¹¹ Finally, al-Fayrūzabādī, in his *al-Qāmūs al-Muhīt*, in this regard says to give permission, or licence or authorization.¹²

Technically, according to Ibn Manzūr, the noun *ijāzah* refers to the authorities on whom a student relies to support his claim to knowledge in a particular science. For al-Nawawī, the student asks a professor to give him an *ijāzah*, that is, to satisfy his thirst for knowledge, and for al-Fayrūzabādī, with regard to education, it refers to giving permission to teach.

The term ‘*ijāzah*’ in Islamic pedagogy signifies generally a ‘*licence to teach*’ or ‘*authorization to transmit*,’ and more specifically refers to a certificate issued by a professor in an institution of higher learning to a student who has attended a course of lectures to the professor’s satisfaction; and who is deemed worthy and henceforth qualified to teach the same subject to his own students.¹³

Thus, the *ijāzah* was issued by the grantor (*al-mujīz*, i.e. ‘*ālim* or professor) who gives licence to transmit from him all what he narrated. Generally, this *ijāzah* contains of: the title of books or

⁸For more detailed information with regard to the titles of other books and their subject matter, see ‘Abdul-Jalīl H. ‘Abdul-Mahdī, *Al-Madāris fī Bayt al-Maqdis fīl-‘Asr al-Ayyūbī wa al-Mamlūkī*, vol. 1, 13-113.

⁹“*Madrasah*” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition.

¹⁰See Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. 1, under “*Ajaza*” (Beirut: 1970), 25.

¹¹M. Abu Zakariya Al-Nawawī, *Al-Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr li-Ma‘rifati Sunan al-Bashīr al-Nazīr* (n.p. & n.d.), 18.

¹²Al-Fayrūzabādī, *Al-Qāmūs al-Muhīt*, ed. by M. Naim al-Araqsusi, 3rd edition (Beirut: Muesset al-Risalah, 1993), 652.

¹³R.Y. Ebied, and M. J. L. Young, *An Early Eighteenth-Century Ijazah Issued in Damietta*, in *Le Muséon - Revue D’études Orientales*, vol.: 87, (1974), 445.

compilations of the subjects and a licence is issued along with it. This transmission from the grantor could be either in general or in detail. The chain of transmitters went back until it ended up either with the author of the book, or the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) or others.¹⁴

In Muslim tradition the authoritative character of the transmission derives ultimately from the Prophet, chosen by God to receive the revelation, the religious knowledge (*'ilm*) necessary for salvation, passed on to him through the agency of the Archangel Gabriel (Jibrīl). This knowledge the Prophet (SAW) passed on orally to his Companions, and they to their Successors, and they to their successors, and so on, down through the centuries to the *'ulamā*.¹⁵ Such was the transmission of hadīth accounts relating to the deeds, words and attitudes of the Prophet (SAW), called his *Sunnah*. The vehicle of this transmission was the spoken word, recited, read aloud, as was the 'Recitation' itself, the Qur'ān.

The *ijāzah* was granted in two ways: orally and written. But, historically the oral way of practice precedes the written one.¹⁵ Before it came to have this broader meaning, the *ijāzah* was simply one of eight methods of validly transmitting hadīths, being classified lower in the scale of reliability than direct transmission by word of mouth.¹⁶ The *muhaddiths* are the first to use this term for the sake of science. Because they are the earliest Muslims who gave importance to writing down knowledge. Later on this method was used for the other sciences.¹⁷ The certification was appended to a book, or other writings, certifying that the owner, and perhaps others along with him who were then also named, studied the materials under his direction. The master could also authorize the person(s) named to transmit the contents on his authority as author of the book, or as one who was duly authorized to make the authorization.

The *ijāzah* to transmit hadīth included the authorization permitting others to do the same: authority and authorization were both transmissible. Next to the licence to transmit hadīth, other types of licences developed, like the licence to teach law, *al-ijāzah li't-tadrīs*. With the development of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), the licence was no longer primarily for the preservation of hadīth for posterity, but it developed further into a licence to instruct, to teach.¹⁸

These licences to teach (*ijāzah*, i.e. written) were first issued in Baghdad as early as third century of the *Hijrah*. And soon, in the fourth century, became a standard universal educational procedure in all the Muslim territories. This procedure was passed afterwards to other subjects; and thus the master would grant a recognized certificate to those students who satisfactorily passed the prescribed course of study under him. During the early period, the *ijāzah* (licence) was usually written upon the fly-leaf of the book studied.¹⁹

¹⁴Muhammad A. Gunaymah, *Tārīkh al-Jāmi'āt al-Islamiyyah al-Kubrā* (Tetuwan, 1953), 219; Muhammad Bakir al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, 2nd edition, vol.: 102 (Beirut: Muassasat al-Wafa', 1983), 166; And see also Agha Buzruk al-Tahrani's *al-Dhari'ah ila Tasanif al-Shi'ah*, quoted in both Abdullah Fayyad, *Tārīkh al-Tarbiya* (Baghdad: Matba'ah As'ad, 1972), 233-234; and Mahmud al-Mar'ashi, *Al-Musalsalat fi al-Ijaza*, vol:1 (Qum: Hafidh, 1416 A.H.-1995 A.D.), 9.

¹⁵Abdullah Fayyād, *Al-Ijāzah al-'ilmiyyah 'inda al-Muslimīn* (Baghdad, 1967), 21; and Muhammad A. Gunaymah, *Tārīkh al-Jāmi'āt al-Islamiyyah al-Kubrā* (Tetuwan, 1953), 223.

¹⁶Mahmud Al-Mar'ashi, *Al-Musalsalat fi al-Ijāzāt*, vol:1-2 (Qum: Hafidh, 1416 A.H.-1995 A.D.), 6-7; and Ignaz Goldziher. and S. A. Bonabakker, "idjaza," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

¹⁷Muhammad A. Gunaymah, *Tārīkh al-Jāmi'āt al-Islamiyyah al-Kubrā*, 220.

¹⁸Abī Abdullah Muhammad Al-Majāri, *Barnāmiy al-Majāri*, ed. by Muhammad Abu al-Ajfan (Beirut: Dar al-Garb al-Islāmī, 1982), 53.

¹⁹Ahmad Shalaby, *History of Muslim Education* (Karachi: Indus Publication, 1979), 147-148.

Interestingly and uniquely, the authority and competence resided in the *'ālim*, the learned man. When the master granted the *ijāzah* to teach law, he acted in his capacity as the legitimate and competent authority in the field of law, it was as an individual, not as part of a group of master-jurisconsults acting as a faculty. Throughout its history down to modern times, the *ijāzah* remained a personal act of authorization, from authorizing *'ālim* to the newly authorized one. The sovereign power had no part in the process: neither caliph, nor sultan, nor *amīr*, nor *qādī*, nor anyone else, could grant such an *ijāzah*. There being no church in Islam, no ecclesiastical hierarchy, no 'university,' that is to say, no guild of masters, no one but the individual master granted the *ijāzah*. However, no one could legally force him to do so, or to refrain from doing so. The line of religious authority rested, not with sovereign power, but rather with the religious scholars, the *'ulamā'*. Moreover, the institutions in which the *'ulamā'* taught were creations completely independent of the sovereign as such, and in no need of his sanction to come into existence. Indeed the sovereign had no say in the matter of the *ijāzah* even when he was the founder of the institution. Islamic education, like Islamic law, is basically individualistic, personalist.²⁰

It is significantly important to state that there were six types of *ijāzahs*, and they are briefly as follows²¹:

1. The Specific *ijāzah*: Here the *ijāzah* is granted by a certain person to another certain person. The four essential parts of this most prestigious type of *ijāzah* are: the specific mention of the professor's name, his student's name, the subject matter and use of the term *ajaztu*.
2. The Non-specific *ijāzah*: Here the professor's name as well as that of the student are mentioned, the subject matter is, however, dropped. Thus, the professor would say that he gave his student the permission to transmit that which the student has studied with him without specifying any book or subject-matter.
3. The General *ijāzah*: Here the professor's name is mentioned, but his students as a group, without specific mention of their names, are given a general permission to transmit knowledge received from him in a specific subject.
4. The *ijāzah* on a particular book: This type of *ijāzah* is very specific; the professor attests that a particular student has studied with him a particular book, or that he has memorized a specific text. Only when the student gives evidence to that effect, he is granted this type of *ijāzah*.
5. The *ijāzah* by correspondence: This type of *ijāzah* is specific to hadīth literature. It is used when an *'ālim* writes down a text and sends it to one or more of his students accompanied by a "letter-*ijāzah*" permitting them to pass on the knowledge to other students that he has been taught by his mentor.
6. The honorific *ijāzah*: These *ijāzahs* are often restricted to *'ulamā'*, and are often exchanged among them as a sign of mutual respect and appreciation.

One may find variants of each one of these types of *ijāzahs*. A general characteristic common to all *ijāzahs*, however, is that they are, as we cited earlier, all personal rather than institutional. This, indeed, is the most outstanding characteristic of certification in Muslim education.

The value of *ijāzahs* to the modern student of Islamic civilization is great. The most important significance of *ijāzahs* can be reduced to five point, which are as follows:

²⁰George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, 271.

²¹For details see Hisham Nashabi, "The Ijaza: Academic Certification in Muslim Education," *Hamdard Islamicus* VIII, Nos 1-4, (1985); and Ibrahim Ali Al-'Aksh, *Al-Tarbiya wa al-Ta'lim fi al-Andalus*, 151-153. In this reference, the types of 3-4 I have not quoted, because both are considered very weak *ijāzahs* and refuted by many scholars, like Ibn al-Zubayr in his *Silat al-Silah*, and al-Māwardī.

- i. They contain a considerable amount of detailed biographical information. The biography of the scholars who transmitted words, attitudes and accounts related to the deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is narrated with the mention of their names, genealogies, titles and works, in addition to those of their professors who authorized them, and so on. This can be considered as a great source for Islamic bibliographies.
- ii. They contain a lot of valuable historical information about the scholars, their scientific activities, practices, views and thoughts.
- iii. They give much information about the cities that were centres of learning and scholarship at particular periods.
- iv. They reveal the books mostly studied in the cultivation of particular subjects.
- v. Finally, a picture can be obtained from them about the development of Islamic academic life and its underlying currents of ideas.

As it is mentioned earlier in relation to the types of *ijāzah*, there is an *ijāzah* called specific *ijāzah*. In this type, there are genres of *ijāzahs* in the fields of, primarily Hadīth, and then other fields such as calligraphy, *tarīqah* (religious order), Sufism, poetry, literature, medical sciences and Islamic sciences. After the development of Hadīth *ijāzahs* in early Muslim history, all other genres of *ijāzah* came into existence.

The *ijāzah* on calligraphy with all its various types were granted by the professors to their students for being qualified as a calligrapher or copyist and clerk in the government offices. For this genre of *ijāzahs*, some examples can be found in al-Muradi's *Silk al-Durar fī A'yān al-Thānī 'Ashar*²² and in Uğur Derman's *Hattat İcazetnameleri*.²³ Many students were interested in the mastery of the Islamic calligraphy and obtaining an *ijāzah* because of the importance of calligraphy in both the government offices and copying the books, when the printing machine did not exist.

As for the medical sciences, in the Muslim world the importance of the medical profession was so well realised that from the beginning of the tenth century A.D., physicians had to pass an examination and obtain a certification without which they would not be allowed to practice this profession. For this genre of *ijāzahs*, we are able to find some examples in Ibn Abī 'Usaybi'ah's *Tabaqat al-Atibbā'*.²⁴

As the structure and content of the *ijāzahs* are concerned, we will be provided a general schema for *ijāzahs* which will include the common characteristics of *ijāzahs* granted in the Muslim world. With minor exceptions, almost all of them more or less conform to this schema.

- The *ijāzah* invariably starts with the *bismillah* (the formula "in the name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful"), and then continues with the praise to God (*alhumdulilah*) and the praise to the Prophet (SAW) and his Companions (*salwalah*).
- The praise of knowledge and its importance: Here are mentioned usually those verses of the Qur'ān and hadīths of the Prophet (SAW) which are related to the significance of knowledge, such as the following Qur'ānic verse: "Say: 'Are those equal those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endowed with understanding that receive admonition'"²⁵; and the

²²He is Abū al-Fadl Muhammad b. 'Alī b. Muhammad al-Murādī.

²³See Uğur Derman, "Hattat İcazetnameleri," [Calligraphers' Licenses], *Paper presented in Türk Tarih Kongresi (Turkish Historical Conference)* (25-29 September 1970), Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu; and *idem.*, "Hattat İcazetnameleri," in *Hattat İmza ve Şecereleri*, [Calligrapher's Signatures and Genealogy], vol. 2, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1973), 716-727.

²⁴Ibn Abī 'Usaybi'ah, *'Uyūn al-Anba' fī Tabaqāt al-Atibbā'*, ed., Nizar Riza (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, 1965).

²⁵Az-Zumar 39:9, (translation of Yusuf Ali).

hadīth such as: “If anyone travels on a road in search of knowledge, Allah will cause him to travel on one of the roads of Paradise.”²⁶

- The importance of *isnād* (transmission certificate): Here usually sayings of the great early scholars with regard to *isnād* are mentioned, such as the saying of Abdullah b. Mubārak: “The *isnād* (transmission certificate) is part of faith (religion).”²⁷
- The names of both the student and his professors: Here the grantor of the *ijāzah* mentions the name of the student to whom the *ijāzah* is being granted. The moral qualities as well as the academic achievement of the student are described. Besides, the grantor avails himself of this opportunity to express his gratitude to his own professors, thus mentioning his own academic lineage.
- The titles of both the books and the subjects on which *ijāzah* was granted are mentioned.
- The chain of transmitters (*silsilah*) usually goes back to God, except if the *ijāzah* is on a particular book, then it goes back to the author of that book. However, for the hadīth books, it goes back to the person who collected the hadīths and wrote down, because the hadīths in that book with the different transmitters goes back to the Prophet (SAW). Moreover, mentioning in the *ijāzah* the name of all transmitters who lived during the period from the Prophet (SAW) to the person who collected hadīths was something very difficult, as the chain of transmission becomes very long and requires great time and writing space. Thus, only some of the names were mentioned.
- Then the grantor proceeds to give advice to the student as to how he should use his knowledge; treat his future students exercise his function as a scholar (‘*ālim*) in the society. He also asks his student not to forget him and requests him to pray for the God’s forgiveness.
- Finally, the *ijāzah* normally ends with a prayer, date of issue, and professor’s ratification of the *ijāzah* either by seal or signature, or both. Yet the institution where the teaching has taken place is rarely mentioned. Only if it is granted in an official ceremony, then the place of ceremony is mentioned. Hence, the place can be verified. Besides this, by verifying the name of professor who granted the *ijāzah* and the date, also the place can be verified. In this way, geographical situation of the Islamic sciences can be described, i.e. where, when, how and which kind of subjects were studied, so the position of that place or district, in terms of political and social relations, comes into light and its role in history can be known.

Nonetheless, it should be clearly mentioned that there are differences between *ijāzahs* and certificates/degrees/diplomas in the modern age. The *ijāzah* tradition, as it was mentioned earlier, developed in Islam at least as early as the 4th century A.H. (10th century A.D). Almost two centuries later, during the second half of the twelfth century, it made its appearance in the Latin West. It was a license to teach, so-called *licentia docendi*, the same as the *ijāzah*. According to George Makdisi, there is not even a single evident showing that education in antiquity, whether in Greece or Rome, did produce the licence to teach. Nor was the licence produced by Eastern Christian Byzantine education, which was a direct continuation of classical education. Nor was it produced by Western Christian Latin education. It first appeared in the West in the second half of the twelfth century, as one of a number of institutions without indigenous antecedents.²⁸ But Daniel Haneberg, in his work on Islamic education, makes the following statement pertaining to *ijāzah*: ‘I suppose that our

²⁶Abi Dawud, *Sunan Abī Dawūd*, no: 3634.

²⁷See Muslim b. Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim (Muqaddimah; the section of introduction)*, 5.

²⁸George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 272.

licentiate stems from this Muslim institution²⁹. Therefore, there is possibility that the origin of *licentia docendi* was from *ijāzah*.

In addition, the stages of development of both *ijāzah* and *licentia docendi*, according to George Makdisi, are quite identical in nature, and he describes them as follows:

From initial training in the literary arts, to embarking on the long course of study leading to the mastership, passing through the ranks of scholar (*mutafaqqih*) and fellow (*faqih*), representing the undergraduate and graduate levels, assisting the master as ordinary repetitor (*mu'id*) or extraordinary docent (*mufid*), including the work of building up repertoires of disputed questions (*masa'il khilafiya, quaestiones disputatae*), the student practice of quizzing one another (*mudhakara, collatio*), disputing for practice with fellow students, or with masters in class (*munazara, disputatio*), disputation based on the confrontation of conflicting opinions (*khilaf, sic et non*), and the mastery of dialectic (*jadal, dialectica*), and finally obtaining the licence to teach (*ijaza li't-tadris, licentia docendi*), and incepting by giving the inaugural lesson or lecture (*dars iftitahi, inceptio*).³⁰

There is only one difference that the development of *ijāzah* in Islam took place more than a century before any part of *licentia docendi* began in the Christian Europe. This was the early form of certificate in the West. But throughout the history, the term '*licentia docendi*' was altered according to the systems of universities into certificate, diploma, degree, etc. Like the case in France, the licence had traditionally been the first degree in France; training for the licence was the central concern of the French system of higher education. However, with the reform of French university diplomas, begun in 1973 and completed in 1976, the position of the licence was altered.³¹ Whereas the term *ijāzah*, in Muslim educational life, remained almost same since it was developed in the early time up today with exception of some areas.

We may proceed to present the main differences between the *ijāzah* and today's certificate or diploma, as a practice. As far as the differences are concerned, it can be reduced into three main differences, and they are as follows³²:

- a. Firstly, a unique feature of Muslim education is that Muslim educational institutions were never concerned with the granting of academic certificate. This is essentially the responsibility of the professor concerned, who, upon the termination of teaching a particular subject would certify some of his students, depending on their performance, to apply, teach or transmit the material taught to them to other seekers of knowledge. Neither the seal, nor the approval of the institution where the professor taught were ever solicited. This, in fact, means that *ijāzah* in Muslim educational practice engaged the responsibility of the professor only. And as long as the professor was conscious of this responsibility, the quality of education and academic standards

²⁹D. Haneberg, *Abhandlung über das Schul- und Lehrwesen der Muhamedaner im Mittelalter* [Treatise on the Schools and Teaching System of the Mohammedans in the Middle Ages] (Munich 1850), quoted in G. Makdisi, 275.

³⁰ George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 276.

³¹See Carol Green, "Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates," in *The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education*, vol.: 4, (D-F), (San Fransisco, Washington and London: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1978), 1234.

³²See my both articles, Mesut Idriz, "The *Ijāzah* Tradition in the 19th – 20th Century Balkans," *Al-Shajarah Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization* (ISTAC), vol.: 5, No. 2 (2000), Kuala Lumpur, 233-236; and Mesut Idriz, "İslâm Eğitimi Yaşamında İcazet Geleneği," [The Tradition of Ijaza in Islamic Educational Life]. *Degerler Eğitim Dergisi*, [Translated into Turkish by Ibrahim Kapalikaya], vol. 1 (July), 2003, 175-177.

were in Muslim culture maintained. In contrast to this situation, educational institutions in West, assume fully the responsibility of certification and the granting of academic titles and degrees. The professor's responsibility in this regard is relegated to a secondary position. This practice creates a problem when universities assume a large size and large classes make it practically impossible for the professor to know his students well enough as to engage his direct responsibility in their certification. Thus, the rich intellectual contact between professors and students is often lost. Only at the graduate level the professor-student relation is maintained.

- b. Secondly, in the *ijāzah*, in addition to the subjects that have been studied, are mentioned the title of books as well as the chain of transmitters (*silsilah*) of the book, which goes back to its author. Whereas the diploma or certification mentions only the subjects which have been studied and not the books studied, nor their authors, nor the chain of transmitters for the books.
- c. Thirdly, the difference in shape. Generally *ijāzahs* are granted in the form of a booklet which sometimes they contain twenty pages and more. But certificates and diplomas are granted in the form of a scroll which they contain one page only.

Having explained briefly the tradition of *ijāzah* in the Muslim world, now we shall proceed with the *ijāzah* tradition in Persian milieu as it is well-known that this tradition in has been widely practiced and still is practiced in the Persian lands and beyond.

3. *Ijāzahs* in Persian Islamic Educational Tradition

Before giving some general remarks about Persian educational *ijāzahs*, one important point should be borne in mind that in the Persian ones, the person or student is not always granted *ijāzah* by a *Shi'i* professor, but sometimes if not mostly by *Sunni* professors. For example, Abu al-Ma'ali Shihabud-Din al-Husayni al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi (1315-1411A.H.) who was a Persian *Shi'i* scholar was granted *ijāzah* by a *Sunni* scholar namely 'Abdul-Hafid b. Muhammad al-Zahiri al-Fahri al-Fasi (1296-1383A.H.).³³ As the comparison below between the *ijāzahs* at large and Persian *ijāzahs* shows both have common characteristics with the exception of some differences. The main differences can be provided as follows:

1. Unlike the case with the others, in most of the Persian and particularly *Shi'i ijāzahs*, the grantor does not quote any of the Qur'ānic verses and the Prophetic *Hadīths* pertaining to the praise of knowledge. For example, no such Qur'ānic verses or *Hadīths* are quoted in the *ijāzahs* of Abi al-Hasan Ali b. Abi Ibrahim granted by Hasan b. Yusuf b. 'Ali b. al-Mutahhar in the year 723 A.H.³⁴ and of Abu al-Ma'ali Shihabud-Din al-Mar'ashi granted by Muhammad Sadiq *Bahrul-'Ulūm* (1315-1399A.H.) in the year 1350 A.H.³⁵ Furthermore, in most of the Persian *ijāzahs*, the statements of the great scholars regarding the importance of *isnad* are not quoted, either. For example, in neither of the above mentioned *ijāzahs*,³⁶ any such statement is found.

³³This *ijāzah* is published in Mahmud Al-Mar'ashi, *Al-Musalsalat fi al-Ijazat*, vol:1, (Qum: Hafidh, 1416 A.H.-1995 A.D.), 312-340. This work is of two volumes. The first volume contains a collection of 164 *ijāzahs* granted to Abu al-Ma'ali Shihabud-Din al-Husayni al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi by various scholars, and the second volume contains the biographies of those scholars.

³⁴This *ijāzah* is not granted only to Abi al-Hasan 'Ali b. Abi Ibrahim, but also to his son Abi 'Abdullah al-Husain, to his brother Badrud-Din Abi 'Abdullah Muhammad and his two sons Abi Talib Ahmad and Abi Muhammad 'Izzud-Din. This *ijāzah* is quoted in M. B. Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 2nd edition, vol:104 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Wafa', 1983), 60-137. In addition, this work is about 114 volumes, in which the volumes 102, 104, 105, 106 and 107 contain the informations regarding the various *ijāzahs* which were granted by the various scholars.

³⁵This *ijāzah* is published in Al-Mar'ashi, *Al-Musalsalat fi al-Ijazat*, vol:1, 171-172.

³⁶The *ijāzahs* of Abi al-Hasan 'Ali b. Abi Ibrahim and Abu al-Ma'ali Shihabud-Din al-Husayni al-Mar'ashi.

2. In the Persian *ijāzahs*, when the grantor speaks of a past scholar whose name occurs among the transmitters, and especially of his grantor, he often gives briefly that scholar's educational background such as his life story and works. For example, 'Abdullah al-Musawi al-Jaza'iri al-Tustari (1112-1173 A.H.), the grantor of both Muhammad b. Karamullah al-Huwayzi (d.1197A.H.) and Ibrahim b. 'Abdullah b. Karamullah al-Huwayzi (d.1172A.H.),³⁷ speaks about a scholar called Ni'matullah b. 'Abdullah al-Musawi al-Jaza'iri (1050-1112A.H.)³⁸ whose name occurs among the transmitters and then gives briefly his educational background which includes his life and works.³⁹ Moreover, when the same grantor speaks especially about his grantor, namely Nasrullah b. al-Husain al-Musawi al-Ha'iri, he gives the latter's educational background in a more detailed form which also includes his life and works.⁴⁰
3. In the Persian *ijāzahs*, sometimes a professor grants *ijāzahs* to more than one student in the text of the same *ijāzah*. For example, 'Abdullah al-Musawi al-Jaza'iri al-Tustari grants such an *ijāzah* to two students Muhammad b. Karamul-Lah al-Huwayzi and Ibrahim b. 'Abdullah b. Karamul-Lah al-Huwayzi, whose names are mentioned above.⁴¹
4. The Persian educational *ijāzahs* sometimes do not contain the chain of the transmitters and the year of issue. For example, the *ijāzah* of Abu al-Ma'ali Shihabud-Din al-Husayni al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi granted by Mirza Fakhrud-Din al-Husaini al-Qumi (1281-1363A.H.) does contain neither the chain of the transmitters nor the year of issue.⁴²
5. Again, most of the Persian *ijāzahs* do not contain the section of *wasiyyah* (advice), as is the case with the *ijāzah* of Shamsud-Din Abi J'afar Muhammad which is granted by Muhammad b. Makki,⁴³ and there are many other examples of this.

4. Conclusion

Analyzing the contents of the *ijāzahs* in Islamic history and civilization, we have clearly noticed the stark differences between both the Islamic and Western systems of education, and the contemporary system of education in the Muslim world at large. While explaining the history and significance of the *ijāzah* tradition in brief, we have asserted our opinion with regard to the fact that the system of education in the West was borrowed from the Islamic tradition of learning. Similarly, the establishment of universities in the West was derived from the conceptual philosophies inherent to the Islamic tradition. Even the practice of awarding a certificate at the termination of one's study and the associated convocation were traditions adopted from the Islamic tradition. However, while both the institutions of education in the West and in the Islamic tradition emphasize curriculum and methodology, the institution of education in the Islamic tradition primarily emphasizes the scholar who is himself an institution. Similarly, the qualifications of a student in the Western tradition are generally ascertained according to the reputation and intellectual heritage of the institution. On the other hand, the qualifications of a student in the Islamic tradition is primarily established according

³⁷Muhammad b. Karamul-Lah al-Huwayzi is uncle of Ibrahim b. 'Abdullah b. Karamul-Lah al-Huwayzi, see Al-Sayyid 'Abdullah Al-Musawi, *Al-Ījāzah al-Kabirah*, ed. by Muhammad al-Samami and supervised by al-Sayyid Mahmud al-Mar'ashi (1409A.H.), 47-50 (in the introduction of the editor). In addition, this book in itself is an *ijāzah* of the two above mentioned students granted by 'Abdullah al-Musawi al-Jaza'iri al-Tustari, and it is considered one of the largest *ijāzahs* which contains about 17 chapters.

³⁸The grandfather of the grantor 'Abdullah al-Musawi al-Jaza'iri al-Tustari.

³⁹Al-Musawi, *Al-Ījāzah al-Kabirah*, 70 -76, (in the main text).

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 83-85, (in the main text). The date when he was born and died is not mentioned.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 51-66, (in the main text).

⁴²This *ijāzah* is published in Al-Mar'ashi, *Al-Musalsalat fi al-Ijzat*, vol:1, 149.

⁴³This *ijāzah* is quoted in Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 2nd ed., vol:104, 193-201.

to the reputation and scholastic authority of the instructor, whose qualifications are authenticated by his instructors who were themselves learned scholars and who in turn ultimately trace their intellectual lineage to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). In this regard, the instructor must be one whose character and scholastic authority cannot be the subject of doubt. Since what he relates is concerned with truth and justice, his authority cannot be confirmed except by another who is himself an authority, and whose character and scholastic resolve is not receptive of doubt.

In this manner, the legitimacy and accuracy of authentic knowledge, both necessary and beneficial, is preserved. In addition, and more importantly, both the systems of education in the Muslim world and in the West rely on epistemology. The epistemology dictating both systems of education is necessarily distinct, made so by the method of interpretation of each respective worldview.

On the one hand, one may postulate that the Western worldview develops historically; in other words, it is shaped by a series of successive intellectual traditions each typified by the ideological milieu derived from culture and the passage of science. In essence, it is not one derived from Revelation (*wahyi*) and is therefore impermanent, dependant upon the persistent formulation of new ideologies. In addition, we maintain that since the Western worldview excludes Revealed knowledge, logically then, there are no fundamental elements as such. In contrast, the worldview of Islam is not one born of culture or social dilemma, nor is it dependant upon the history or the passage of scientific discovery. Conversely it is the worldview itself that gives rise to culture and consequently civilization. In short, it is Revelation which projects the fundamental elements of the worldview, elements whose knowledge is based on certainty. Consequently, one may say that the system of education in the West develops historically, that is to say the curriculum is derived from the ideological milieu which is itself a consequence of culture and the passage of scientific discovery; while the Islamic system of education is derived from the fundamental elements inherent to the worldview of Islam.

What of the current system of education in the Muslim world? One may say that in general Muslim world has recognized the Western system of education. We have been mindful of the fact that the West began borrowing from Muslim institutions as early as the tenth century, and subsequently introduced them to their respective States; among those was the institution of education which then became the foundations for Western scholasticism. Some may argue that by virtue of the fact that the West borrowed from the Islamic tradition, it should be possible to simply adopt Western institutions. Earlier we said that the epistemology dictating both systems of education is necessarily distinct, made so by the method of interpretation of each respective worldview. The West, in borrowing Muslim institutions, interpreted and conceptualized those institutions according to their own worldview, a worldview which, as we have already mentioned, is not one derived from Revelation and is therefore temporal, dependant upon the persistent formulation of new ideologies as dictated by the passage of history and scientific discovery. Therefore, if we now were to adopt those same institutions from the West without first interpreting and conceptualizing those institutions according to the Muslim worldview, one which is characterized by permanence and founded upon certainty by virtue of the fact that it embraces Revealed knowledge, then clearly what results is something incompatible to Islam. For this reason one cannot simply adopt Western institutions *en bloc*. At the same time however, we do not presume that the institution of education in the West is incompatible to Islam. In addition, one must not presume that the West has nothing 'new' to offer. For example, most curriculums offered in prestigious institutions of learning in the West, are far more mature than those adopted by some 'reputable' institutions of learning in the Muslim world which claim to adopt an Islamic system of education exemplified by the genuine *madrasah* system. On this note, we are not asserting that the model of the *madrasah* system does not exist, only that the current purpose and 'philosophy' of the contemporary model does not reflect its original intent. As a result,

the contemporary conceptual understanding associated with the term '*madrasah*' is that of religious extremism, backwardness and violence.

Rather than to adopt the original emphasis and purpose of the *madrasah* system, it would appear that the current system of education in the Muslim world, in particular privatized institutions of higher learning, are more concerned with economic gain. The curriculum in these institutions, appear to emphasize technology rather than science. Ignorance of the sciences will eventually lead to moral decadence and societal discord. Hence, our purpose for introducing this brief work is primarily to emphasize the purpose of education by illustrating the epistemological foundations of the *madrasah*, and to exemplify the effectiveness of such a system drawing on the *ijāzahs* of the Ottoman Balkans.

The *ijāzah* tradition, as mentioned earlier, has a long history and was developed by the Muslims at least as early as the 3rd century A.H. (9th century A.D). It is an original tradition developed by Muslims under the influence of Islamic sciences such as Hadīth and Qur'ānic exegesis. In the 4th century A.H., it became a universally applied educational procedure in all the Muslim lands, and had significant impacts on the educational life of the Christian Europe. The *ijāzah* tradition continued for centuries up to the beginning of 20th century, and even survives today in some parts of the Muslim world such as Persia and Arabia, but unfortunately not in the Balkans.

The various Ottoman Balkan *ijāzahs* on Islamic sciences we have studied shows the religious, cultural and educational unity of the Muslims in the past, in spite of their geographical differences, as in each part of these Muslim lands, the tradition of *ijāzah* was more or less same with some minor differences in practice, as it has been shown during our analysis. Besides, there was a linguistic unity as well, for almost all the *ijāzahs* were written in Arabic, which was the *lingua franca* in the Islamic world. Even the term *ijāzah* (and its variation *ijazetname*) has remained the same in almost all over the Muslim world, but the term *licentia docendi* which was the early form of certificate in the Christian Europe, in contrast to the Muslim world, it was altered throughout the history according to the systems of universities into certificate, diploma, degree, etc.

The *ijāzahs* reflect the Muslim world-view and ethical values as well. They were not mere documents showing the students' qualifications; rather, as we saw, they contained praise to God, His Prophet and knowledge, and statements about the importance of knowledge and of ethical values such as humility, love and respect for knowledge and scholars.

All the *ijāzahs* contain chain of transmitters for the subjects, showing the source of knowledge ending up with the scholars of the past. Sometimes, especially in the subjects of Qur'ān and *Hadīth*, this chain went as back as to the Prophet or the Almighty Allah. This openly shows the great influence of the *Hadīth* methodology upon the *ijāzah* tradition. In addition, it had an important consequence: the professor was more important than the institute, for it was the former who granted the *ijāzah*, in contrast to the Western practice. However, this did not mean that the procedure and the requirement for *ijāzah* -granting were arbitrary; rather as the documents of *ijāzah* and the historical information show, the professors were conscious of their duties and responsibility, and the quality of education and academic standards were maintained to a great extent. Moreover, the information on the transmitters and the knowledge they transmitted is a valuable source for the modern researcher as well. Finally, our study also shows that the Persians were part of this tradition and that they contributed to it by establishing *madrasahs* and other centres of learning and producing many scholars.

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